OFFICE SAFETY

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INTRODUCTION

An accident is an unexpected event being caused by one of two things, an *unsafe act* of a person or an *unsafe physical condition*, or, perhaps, a combination of both. Accident prevention is the foreseeing of the cause and taking definite steps to eliminate it. Prevent the accident and there will be no injury.

OFFICE SAFETY

The office area is usually considered to be relatively safe but an inspection of any office will, probably, reveal a number of unsafe practices and conditions.

The low accident frequency rate for office workers frequently leads to an attitude of indifference towards accident prevention. Most of the accidents that occur in offices are of a minor nature and this, plus the attitude of indifference, results in many skin punctures, paper cuts or other slight injuries being neglected although there is a definite obligation on the part of those injured to report for prompt first-aid treatment.

In so far as accident prevention is concerned, the office is no different than the shop. The basic fundamentals of a good safety program are the sincere interest of administration, a work area free from accident hazards and the continuous, intelligent co-operation on the part of the employees.

Office hazards may be classified in five main groups: Handling Materials and Equipment, Slipping-Tripping-Falling, Falling Objects, Collision or Striking Against, and Miscellaneous.

HANDLING MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

Lifting

The movement of boxes or bundles of office supplies, ledgers, portable filing cases, and various items of office equipment constitutes a definite lifting hazard. Employees whose work involves the handling of heavy materials should be trained in proper methods of lifting by leg power with the back erect. Precautions should be taken to see that instructions are not violated. Mechanical devices should be provided for the handling of very heavy loads. Windows should be readily accessible, equipped with suitable handles and counterweights, and should open easily.

Office Machines

Billing, bookkeeping, accounting and tabulating, calculating, coin handling, dictating, duplicating, addressing machines, etc., are now in common use in offices. Since office workers are usually not familiar with mechanical hazards, these machines must be guarded as completely as possible. If belts, gears, pulleys and other rotating or reciprocating parts are not completely enclosed by the manufacturer, they should be guarded by the purchaser.

In electrical connections, no current-carrying parts should be exposed, and all non-current carrying metal parts should be grounded. A convenient method of grounding machine frames is to use a three-point plug, the third wire leading to a ground connection at the plug end and attached to the frame at the machine end.

Operators should be given thorough instruction in the use of mechanical equipment, and no unauthorized or unskilled persons should be permitted to use it except when receiving instruction under competent supervision. The repair and maintenance of office machines should be the responsibility of a mechanic trained for that purpose. Machines should not be adjusted or cleaned while in motion. If a machine jams, the power should be turned off before an attempt is made to remove the obstruction.

Furniture

Through normal wear and tear, the veneer on office furniture frequently becomes chipped or splintered. This condition constitutes a definite hazard of splinter injuries which are usually painful and may be serious because of the danger of infection. The removal of all foreign particles from a splinter wound is often difficult and immediate first-aid attention should be given to insure that the wound is properly cleaned and

treated against infection. Damaged furniture and broken veneered surfaces should be repaired. The front sides of desks, where they are bumped repeatedly by chairs, can be protected by the use of small rubber bumpers.

Pointed Objects

Uncapped fountain pens or other pointed objects should not be carried with points exposed, either in pockets or attached to the clothing. Pens placed on desks with points toward the user create a skin puncture hazard. Employees should not walk through congested aisles or working areas with pens, pencils, knives, or scissors carried in their hands with points exposed. Unprotected spike files are a constant hazard and it is recommended that their use be prohibited. If files of this general type are considered indispensable, curved or closed files having the points covered when not in use, are available. Inexpensive hand paper punches have eliminated most of the unsafe methods of punching holes for paper fasteners. Hand awls and similar devices should not be used for this purpose. Thumbtacks become serious injury hazards if scattered over floors, chairs, and table tops, or if tossed into desk or cabinet drawers. When removed from bulletin boards, drawing boards, and other points of use they should be placed in closed containers.

Doors and Drawers

Improper closing of safes and vaults may result in mashed or severely bruised fingers. They should be closed by grasping the handles, with the fingers away from the door edge. Typewriter compartments in desks should be opened and closed only by means of the attachments provided for that purpose. File cabinet drawers should not be closed by grasping the edge of the drawer. Where file cabinets open face to face, sufficient space should be provided between them to prevent hand injuries when opposite drawers are opened at the same time.

SLIPPING • TRIPPING • FALLING

Slipping Hazards

Slipping hazards may be created by water, oil, soap, waste paper or other refuse on floors. Linoleum and other polished floor surfaces should be treated with a slip-resistant preparation. By careful selection of floor preparations from reputable manufacturers, and by equally careful use according to directions, the slipping hazard of an office can be greatly reduced.

Torn or loose floor covering should be treated with a suitable floor preparation or covered with a protective material such as linoleum. The wearing of extremely high heels during office hours should be discouraged.

Running in aisles and corridors and overcrowding of elevator cars are serious problems in some offices. Both are likely to be acute during the lunch period and at the end of the work day, when certain employees are hurrying to get to the head of the line in the lunch room or trying to be the first to leave the building. A suggested method of control is the use of educational measures supported by effective supervision.

Stairways

Stairways should be well lighted and equipped with antislip treads and suitable hand rails. Running and crowding on stairways are especially dangerous practices and should not be tolerated. If necessary to avoid excessive crowding, rest-periods and meal hours should be staggered.

Difference of Floor Elevation

Differences of floor elevation in aisles and passageways should be clearly indicated by identifying marks painted on the floor; in other places railings should be installed.

Power and Telephone Outlets

Power and telephone outlets should be installed flush with the wall or so located that employees will

not stumble over them. Extension cords running over floor areas where employees have occasion to walk should be enclosed in conduits sunk flush with the floor, covered by formed metal-strips, or otherwise enclosed in such a way as to eliminate tripping. If their temporary use in the open is necessary, cords should be protected by portable barriers, or clearly identified by conspicuous tags or by striping with paint. In temporary offices, extension cords may be suspended from the ceilings.

Ladders and Stands

When rolling and trolley-type ladders are used, as in high filing or in supply rooms, they should be provided with brakes and stops which will prevent excessive speed or movement beyond the limits of the supporting surfaces. This equipment should be used only by authorized employees who have been taught to use it safely. Ladders should be inspected regularly to eliminate loose or defective treads, loose fittings, and other defects. Small ladders and stands should be provided with anti-slip treads and feet. The use of chairs and boxes instead of ladders and stands should not be permitted.

Chairs

The common swivel chair should not be overlooked as a potential cause of accidents. Weak spring tension

adjusting bolts, too great elevation of the chair seat, or tilting the chair too far back may lead to severe falls.

FALLING OBJECTS

File Cabinets

Many injuries have been caused by file cabinets which were not properly secured. Violent closing of drawers of vertical-type file cabinets frequently results in bending the roller carriers at the bottom of the drawers. This makes the drawers hard to open; subsequent jerking and pulling at them may cause the cabinets to overturn. Overloading the upper drawers of file cabinets or standing on or in lower drawers may cause the cabinets to tip forward. To correct these conditions cabinets should be anchored securely. File clerks should be given instruction on how to open and close file drawers. The drawers of file cabinets should be equipped with positive stops, should open in only one direction, and should be kept closed when not in use.

The method of securing vertical file cabinets will depend on the number in use and their location. Individual cabinets should be anchored to the floor or wall. Two or more placed in a row should be fastened together, and if all of them are used at the same time they should be further secured against overbalancing.

One convenient method of securing double rows of vertical cabinets placed back to back is to attach an angle iron to the floor along the front of each row. Ordinarily it will not be necessary to attach the cabinets to the angle iron since the weight of an open drawer will be offset by the cabinet directly behind it in the second row.

Metal Lockers

Metal lockers and shelves should also be attached to walls or floors or otherwise secured against tipping and falling.

Card Index Files

Precaution should be taken to prevent falling of card index files placed on top of file cabinets or on desks. When used in multiple units they should be fastened together. If it is necessary to store miscellaneous material on top of lockers, file cabinets, or other relatively high equipment, it should be so arranged that there is no danger of its being accidentally dislodged. Overcrowding of desk and table tops may cause injury from falling objects.

Ceiling Fixtures

All ceiling fixtures should be inspected immediately after installation and after repair or replacement. No

one should be allowed to remain directly below a fixture that is being repaired or an enclosed light bulb that is being replaced. Diffusion globes should be adequately supported. The fall of ceiling plaster or insulating tiles can cause serious injury.

Others

Sharp-pointed scissors and letter-openers, hand stapling machines, and many other familiar items of equipment may, if dropped, cause painful foot injury.

COLLISION OR STRIKING AGAINST

Two-Way Traffic

Two-way traffic around blind corners should be separated by lines painted on the floor, or, if necessary, by railings. Office employees have been injured by walking into closed transparent, unlettered glass doors. Such doors should have a clearly visible identifying mark in the center of the glass panel at a height of approximately 4½ feet above the floor. Solid swinging doors should have vision apertures or clear glass observation panels. Partly open doors are dangerous; they should be kept either wide open or closed. The tension of springs on self-closing doors should be so

adjusted that the doors will not close with too great force. Exit doors should open outward and should be designated by signs which are clearly visible under all office operating conditions.

Electric Fans

Electric fans should be properly anchored and guarded and maintained in good operating condition. They should be installed at points where employees are not likely to come into contact with them. Fans within seven feet of the floor should have the blades enclosed in wire mesh guards.

Projections

Protruding radiator valves and riser plugs may cause ankle or leg injuries. Pencil sharpeners extending beyond the ends of desks and tables, filing cabinets with projecting devices or those which extend into aisles because of their length, desk drawers left open, open fronts in sectional drawers, glass desk tops with broken or chipped edges, and defective or broken metal waste paper baskets having sharp edges or points are some of the other office hazards which should be eliminated. Swinging the arms when walking down aisles adjacent to desks may lead to painful bruises from striking desk corners.

Improving the Physical Arrangement

Improving the physical arrangement wherever necessary is essential but the results will still be unsatisfactory unless definite safety rules are established and employees are trained to observe them. Such practices as running or hurrying while opening doors in stairways, going through revolving doors two at a time, and reading correspondence while walking should not be permitted. If necessary, governing devices should be installed on revolving doors to prevent their being operated at a speed too high for safety. It is desirable that cloak rooms be located near exits.

MISCELLANEOUS

Extension Cords

Cords for electrically-operated office machines, fans, lamps and other equipment should be properly installed and inspected frequently to prevent the appearance of defects which may cause shocks or burns. Switches should be provided, either in the equipment or in the cords, so that it is not necessary to pull the plugs to shut off the power. Extension cords should be free from splices and they should be disconnected by grasping the plug, not by pulling on the cord. The fact that office equipment is operated at relatively low

voltage is no assurance that serious injury will not occur. There are on record instances of fatalities caused by circuits of 100 volts or less.

Keyed Metal Light Sockets

Keyed metal light sockets may be especially dangerous when located near plumbing or other grounded equipment. Such sockets should be grounded or replaced with a non-conducting type, such as porcelain, plastic, or rubber. Wall receptacles should be so designed and installed that no current-carrying parts will be exposed, and outlet plates should be kept tight to eliminate possibility of shock or collision injury. Extension cords should not rest on steam pipes or other metallic surfaces.

Installation or Repair

In the installation or repair of any electrical equipment, the work should be done by qualified workmen using only approved materials. Since defective wiring may constitute both shock and fire hazards, all recommendations in the electrical code should be observed.

Fire Prevention

There are many unsafe practices which may create fire hazards. Some of them are: permitting loose waste paper on floors and in corners, keeping loose matches

in desk drawers, placing matches in stands with the heads exposed, indiscriminate disposal of cigarette stubs, and throwing burnt matches, cigarette and cigar stubs into waste paper baskets. For greater safety noncombustible waste paper baskets are desirable.

Flammable Material

Flammable material should be stored where it is least likely to be ignited, and where, if ignition occurs, the fire can be most effectively controlled. Special precautions should be observed in the handling of materials capable of spontaneous ignition. Oily rags should not be thrown into open waste receptacles or stored in piles in supply closets; they should be placed in closed fireproof containers. The storage of flammable material in lockers and cloak rooms should not be permitted. Open gas heaters should have permanent connections to gas lines and should be so guarded as to prevent papers and other flammable materials from coming into contact with the flame. Fire escapes should conform with local codes and should be inspected periodically.

Fire Extinguishers

An adequate supply of fire extinguishers should be provided. They should be installed in carefully selected, easily accessible places, and employees should

be taught how to use them. The construction, the purpose, and method of operation of each type of extinguisher in the office should be taught by explanation and discussion, and by permitting employees to handle the equipment. A regular schedule of inspection should be followed to keep fire extinguishers charged and in good working order. Each extinguisher should be identified by number and have securely attached to it, a card on which the date and the name of the inspector are entered at the time of each inspection. If different types of extinguishers are used, the location of each should be marked with the same number that appears on the extinguisher. Fire hose should be inspected frequently. The frequency of fire drills will be determined by the physical condition of the office and surrounding installations.

Inspections

Frequent inspections should be made to discover and eliminate as many office hazards as possible. In any office the variety of hazards is sufficiently great that constant vigilance on the part of the safety organization is necessary.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Good housekeeping throughout the office is of paramount importance. Instead of by-passing and ignoring obvious hazards, each worker should be

encouraged to report or correct them as soon as they are observed. Attention should be focussed constantly on preventive action. Janitor's closets and supply cupboards should be inspected regularly to prevent accumulation of combustible waste materials and to prevent unsafe storage of supplies.

Horseplay

Horseplay of any kind, such as throwing paper clips or shooting them with rubber bands, throwing objects out of windows, scuffling, etc., should be discouraged.

First-Aid

First-aid service should be provided in every office. If the office staff is large enough to warrant it, a well equipped first-aid room should be established with a trained attendant or a registered nurse in charge. If a special room is not practical, cots should be placed in rest-rooms and first-aid kits provided.

Off-the-Job

Off-the-job safety. No safety program is complete if it fails to give full consideration to off-the-job safety.

While the office worker may face less serious hazards in his work than the shop employee, he is confronted with exactly the same hazards on the street and highways, in other public places, and at home. The proportion of time lost through off-the-job accidents will

vary in different offices, but experience indicates that it is relatively high in all. Many of the injuries suffered off-the-job are far more serious than most of those caused by accidents in the office. Office safety committees should include in their programs consideration of off-the-job hazards. Off-the-job literature and posters should be as much a part of the safety educational program in the office as in the plant. If complete records of off-the-job accidents are maintained, they will provide authentic information on which to base the necessary educational measures.

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